

GENDER STEREOTYPES AND SOCIAL MEDIA: A NEED FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Gender stereotypes are deeply entrenched globally, influencing views and opportunities, and their propagation is significantly reinforced by the extensive use of social media platforms. This article investigates the complex interaction between social media and gender stereotypes, with a specific emphasis on the African environment. The study explores the historical foundations of gender stereotypes in Africa, citing cultural traditions, colonial legacies, and patriarchal systems as key perpetuating factors. It analyzes how social media reinforces conventional gender norms, objectifies women, and limits the representation of diverse gender identities, contributing to issues like cyberbullying and online harassment. Conversely, it examines social media's role in challenging these stereotypes by amplifying the voices and accomplishments of African women, promoting networking, and fostering digital feminist movements. The article highlights the need for media literacy, digital citizenship education, and effective inclusive gender management, using both multi-domestic and global approaches—to combat these online biases. It concludes that intensifying debate, research, and collaborative efforts are crucial to establishing a more equitable and inclusive digital environment across the African continent.

Keywords: Stereotypes, Gender, Social Media, Traditions, Inclusive Management

Introduction:

Globally, social media has evolved as a potent instrument for communication, information sharing, and community development. Social media platforms have the capacity to question and alter perceptions of the general public on established gender roles especially in Africa, where cultural norms and gender stereotypes have traditionally dictated society attitudes. The pervasive nature of social media has fundamentally reshaped communication, interaction, and the construction of social realities in the 21st century. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) are not merely conduits for information but active environments where identities are performed, norms are negotiated, and cultural values are disseminated and contested. Within this dynamic digital landscape, the representation and reinforcement of gender stereotypes have emerged as critical areas of concern. Gender stereotypes, defined as generalized preconceptions about the attributes, characteristics, or roles possessed by or performed by women and men, are deeply embedded within societal structures and are increasingly mirrored, amplified, and sometimes challenged within the complex ecosystem of social

media. However, the continent is still dealing with deeply ingrained preconceptions that might mitigate progressive action towards gender equality prevailing in developed nations.

Gender stereotype in Nigeria is heavily influenced by cultural variables such as values, beliefs, and conventions. Gender equality and the abolition of gender discrimination in Africa have been hampered by cultural factors. Women were often presented in an inferior manner relative to their potentials and abilities (Grau & Zotos, 2016). There are societal attitudes that limit women to becoming housewives solely. This notion prevents women from entering roles traditionally held by males. African women continue to struggle to advance to top positions in government (Olufemi & David, 2011). For example, despite the government's 35% affirmative action for women participation in Nigeria, there remains widespread exclusion of women from politics (Olufemi & David, 2011). The conception is that women's effective involvement has been hampered by cultural considerations which have been the determinant factor in gender stereotype.

Obviously, social media has had an impact on many elements of society, including the propagation of gender stereotypes. According to Huber and Baena (2023), social media might have the potential to challenge gender stereotypes. In African context, where social media has grown in popularity and use in recent years, the social media might have both positive and negative impacts on gender stereotypes. This article investigates the influence of social media on confronting gender stereotypes in Africa, as well as to suggest the initiatives to change the perceived attitudes. The study therefore seeks to address the following questions: How do gender stereotypes manifest through social media platforms? What inclusive management approaches are both feasible and effective?

Research Problem:

Social media platforms have become powerful agents in shaping societal perceptions, including those related to gender. While these platforms offer opportunities for self-expression and community building, they also perpetuate and amplify gender stereotypes. Addressing these issues requires a commitment to diversity and inclusive management within social media organizations. The core issue is the complicated, often detrimental, relationship between social media and deeply ingrained gender stereotypes, particularly in the African context, where cultural factors significantly influence these norms. Social media is a potent force that can both challenge and amplify gender norms. Addressing its role is significant because the pervasive nature of stereotypes on these platforms has profound consequences on self-perception, mental health, career paths, and the overall safety and participation of women and marginalized groups in the digital space.

Research Methodology:

The study adopts a qualitative research design complemented by an integrative literature review. The qualitative approach is appropriate because gender stereotyping on social media is a socially constructed phenomenon best understood through participants' perceptions, lived experiences, and synthesis of empirical and theoretical studies on gender stereotypes, platform governance, and inclusive management.

Gender Roles and Stereotypes in Africa:

Gender role is contingent on diverse cultural values and societal expectations. Africa is a varied continent with a rich cultural heritages and religious beliefs that showcasing their diversities. Traditional gender norms, on the other hand, often confine women to household tasks, childcare, and limited decision-making ability. Men, on the other hand, are expected to provide for their families and hold positions of power. Though, this does not mean that women have not achieved some progress in managerial executive positions in corporate and public organisations worldwide (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010). Research indicates that social media often reinforces traditional gender roles through content, algorithms, and user interactions. Women are frequently depicted in stereotypical roles, emphasizing appearance and domesticity, while men are portrayed as assertive and career-oriented (Döring &

Mohseni, 2019). These representations can influence users' self-perceptions and aspirations, particularly among adolescents (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

Research has revealed that gender role development is socially constructed and learned from birth (Chick et al., 2002). Gender segregation continues to exist in different human and occupational domains (Eccles et al., 1990). It could be difficult to insulate gender roles from traditional perceptions in Africa. According to the postulation of Martin (1995), gender stereotypes stemmed from the traditional conceptions and perceptions which are rooted in the socio-cultural configuration of the system. Women scientists still face gender stereotypes and are underrepresented in media coverage today. Social media might, however, challenge existing gender preconceptions of scientists, promote diversity in scientific communication, and provide new avenues for visibility (Huber & Baena, 2023). To understand the presence of gender stereotypes in Africa, it is necessary to explore the historical causes that have led to their persistence. Cultural traditions, colonial legacies, and patriarchal systems have all had an impact on society standards and expectations. These forces have often constrained women to conventional gender roles, perpetuating preconceptions that hinder their autonomy, desires, and societal contributions. These preconceptions contribute to gender inequity, restrict women's chances, and encourage detrimental gender norms.

The Impact of Social Media:

With the development of social media, people now have a platform to express their opinions, experiences, and concerns, challenging established preconceptions and prompting discussions about gender roles. African women are increasingly using social media to raise their voices, campaign for their rights, and question cultural norms. In Africa, social media platforms have evolved into strong instruments for communication, self-expression, and knowledge exchange (Dixon, 2017). They do, however, act as conduits for the replication and reinforcement of gender norms. Social media platforms maintain conventional gender norms and intensify women's objectification via numerous channels such as photographs, videos, and comments. The pervasive nature of gender stereotypes on social media platforms has profound and far-reaching consequences, affecting individuals on a personal level and shaping broader societal attitudes and structures. These impacts range from influencing self-worth and mental health to shaping career paths and perpetuating systemic inequalities. Furthermore, the online environment itself becomes less safe and participatory, particularly for women and marginalized groups, due to stereotype-driven harassment.

Furthermore, the lack of representation of varied gender identities on these platforms marginalizes people and fosters negative stereotypes (Dixon, 2017). Gender stereotypes spread via social media have a wide-ranging influence on Africa. For starters, it has an impact on people's self-perception and self-esteem. Women, in particular, are often exposed to unattainable beauty standards, body shaming, and objectification, which leads to feelings of inadequacy and low confidence. Second, the internet environment has grown unfriendly to women, with cyberbullying, harassment, and sexism posing persistent risks. These experiences discourage women's engagement, silence their voices, and limit their capacity to fully participate in digital networks. There are now digital feminist movements that use hashtags, online campaigns, and group organization to spread awareness and effect social change. Social media has spawned online communities where people may connect, exchange stories, and get guidance on many gender-related concerns. With the help of these networks, people may question prejudices and gain support from others going through comparable difficulties. Social media may, however, have the power to subvert persistent gender preconceptions of scientists, promote diversity in scientific communication, and provide new opportunities for visibility (Huber & Baena, 2023). They are essential in encouraging group action for gender equality and creating a feeling of belonging.

Online sexism and cyberbullying, which disproportionately target women and perpetuate gender stereotypes, may flourish on social media sites. To guarantee a welcoming and secure online community, problems like the misrepresentation of women, hate speech, and trolling must be addressed. Social media algorithms often aid in the development of feedback loops and filter bubbles, which are situations in which people are only exposed to material that supports their own opinions. This may restrict opportunities to challenge gender stereotypes and limit exposure to other

viewpoints. The perpetuation of gender stereotypes on social media has significant psychological and social consequences. Exposure to stereotypical content is linked to lower self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and limited career ambitions among women and girls (Perloff, 2014). For men, rigid portrayals can discourage emotional expression and reinforce toxic masculinity (Vaterlaus et al., 2015). The culmination of exposure to stereotypes, social comparison, body image pressures, self-objectification, and online negativity contributes to adverse mental health outcomes. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses indicate correlations between social media use (particularly problematic use or high investment in appearance) and increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, psychological distress, and eating disorders. The pathways often involve mediating factors like social comparison, internalization of ideals, self-objectification, and low self-esteem. While cross-sectional studies consistently show these associations, longitudinal research presents a more complex picture regarding direct causality, with some studies finding small or non-significant long-term effects of time spent on social media on later mental health, suggesting mediating factors and individual differences are crucial. However, the link between specific types of engagement (e.g., appearance comparison, exposure to harmful content) and negative mental health outcomes remains a significant concern, particularly for adolescents and young adults. In research on social psychology, it was revealed that workplace discrimination harms women's self-confidence and mental health which could eventually lead to them quitting the job (Corsten, Daviddi, & Doering, 2025). Gender differences are also noted, with some studies suggesting stronger negative associations for girls, potentially linked to higher social media use, greater propensity for social comparison, and societal emphasis on female appearance.

Social media Disrupting Gender Stereotypes:

Gender stereotyping remains embedded reflective in societal interactions in terms of both social behaviours and biological determinism (Smith, 2014). This situation has been preventing the enactment of effective legislation in addressing the gender stereotypes that have characterized the African settings (Smith, 2014). However, social media has been crucial in exposing the accomplishments and talents of African women even in previously male-dominated sectors. For instance, women in STEM, business, politics, and other professions are fighting the perception that some jobs are just for males by showing their achievements. The main stream media has been deficient in the portrayal of women as equal to men. According to Sharda (2014), the portrayal of women as equal has not been given the deserved priority. Social media platforms enable women to break down barriers and motivate others to follow their hobbies by providing a forum for mentoring, networking, and information sharing.

Social media has provided African women with a means to amplify their voices and share their stories. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have enabled women to express their opinions, advocate for their rights, and raise awareness about gender-based issues. Social media information might be especially potent in shaping conceptions because the internet offers an unprecedented ability to choose certain kinds of content above others (Dixon, 2017). By doing so, the social media offers the opportunity to challenge the traditional stereotypes of gender roles and push for more inclusive and gender equality societies.

Social media has facilitated discussions around redefining masculinity and femininity in Africa. Men and women are challenging the rigid gender roles imposed on them, promoting inclusivity, and embracing a more fluid understanding of gender identity. Influencers, bloggers, and activists use social media platforms to encourage self-expression, breaking free from stereotypes that confine individuals to prescribed gender norms.

Challenging Gender Stereotypes and inclusive management in Africa:

An all-encompassing strategy is necessary to combat gender stereotypes on social media. First and foremost, encouraging critical thinking and ethical online activity requires media literacy and digital citizenship education. We can encourage a more critical and inclusive internet culture by giving people the tools to examine and confront preconceptions. On social media sites, efforts should be taken to provide safe places where people may express themselves without fear of harassment or discrimination. To do this, effective reporting systems, community standards, and aggressively enforcing laws against

hate speech and sexism must be put in place. Stereotypes may also be broken down through promoting efforts that encourage positive portrayals of gender diversity and highlighting the perspectives of oppressed groups. In essence, social media might have the potential and propensity to engender challenges towards the current gender stereotypes by opening new ways to make gender equality visible (Huber & Baena, 2023).

Social media platforms currently wield immense power in shaping cultural narratives around gender (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Without a concerted effort to embed diversity and inclusion within the companies that create these platforms, they risk continuing to function as vectors for harmful stereotypes and inequality. Therefore, effective inclusive gender management is essential in dispelling the gender stereotypes that characterized African system. Inclusive gender management might be put into practice through two approaches according to Nishii and Ozbilgin (2007). The first approach which is the multi-domestic approach, focuses on recognizing variations in economic, social, political, legal, and cultural norms of the people. By this, gender stereotypes are addressed locally based on the peculiarity of the local people. The second approach is the global approach which takes holistic approach at inclusive gender management across all cultures. As such, with the help of institutional/organisational headquarters, this strategy enables organizations at the national level to establish, fund, and put inclusive management into practice while taking into account local considerations. In other words, when an organization implements gender based inclusive programmes throughout all nations, it uses the global strategy. This could be achieved through effective legislation that openly promotes gender equality with adequate public education to condemn the traditional gender stereotypes. To counteract these effects, social media companies must prioritize diversity and inclusion in their management practices. Diverse leadership teams are more likely to recognize and address biases in content moderation, algorithm design, and platform policies (Hunt et al., 2018). Inclusive management fosters environments where diverse voices are heard, leading to more equitable representation and safer online spaces (Sharma & Sharma, 2020).

Conclusion

The intersection of gender stereotypes and social media presents a complex and urgent challenge with profound implications for individual well-being, societal equality, and the responsibilities of the technology industry. Social media has a significant influence on gender stereotypes in Africa. While it upholds negative stereotypes and maintains established gender roles, it also offers a forum for action, opposition, and the redefining of gender standards. The impacts of this online environment are substantial. At the individual level, exposure to pervasive gender stereotypes contributes to negative body image, lower self-esteem, self-objectification, and mental health challenges like anxiety, depression, and eating disorders, particularly among young women. At the societal level, these online dynamics reinforce traditional gender role attitudes, contribute to sexism, shape relationship expectations, and limit career aspirations, notably steering girls away from STEM fields. Effective strategies include implementing bias training, diversifying hiring practices, and establishing clear guidelines for inclusive content. Collaboration with advocacy groups and regular audits of platform algorithms can further reduce the spread of harmful stereotypes (Noble, 2018).

Furthermore, online gender-based violence and harassment create unsafe environments, silencing women's voices and hindering their participation in digital public life. It is expedient to strive toward a more equitable and inclusive digital environment by appreciating the historical backdrop, analyzing the impact of social media platforms, and taking consequences for people and society into account. This could dispel gender stereotypes, elevate underrepresented voices, and pave the path for a more progressive future in Africa via lobbying, education, and group effort. Gender stereotypes in Africa have a lot of room for challenge and change achievable through social media. It gives people the confidence to question long-aged/established conventions and promote gender equality by elevating minority voices, rethinking masculinity and femininity, and creating supportive networks. However, measures must be put in place to avoid social media abuse. The evidence overwhelmingly supports the central thesis: fostering workforce diversity and implementing inclusive management are not tangential concerns but essential prerequisites for social media companies aiming to meaningfully address the propagation and harm of gender stereotypes on their platforms. A lack of internal diversity directly

contributes to the external manifestation of bias in technology design, algorithmic outcomes, and platform safety. Therefore, creating more equitable and responsible digital ecosystems necessitates fundamental changes within the organizations that build them. Inclusive management practices are vital to ensure that diverse perspectives are not only present but are actively valued, heard, and integrated into decision-making processes, translating representation into tangible improvements in platform design and governance. The use of social media as a tool for increasing awareness, encouraging inclusion, and campaigning for gender equality in Africa should be widely adopted. Achieving this demands sustained commitment, transparency, and collaboration from tech companies, policymakers, educators, and users alike, working together to build a digital future that challenges, rather than reinforces, gender stereotypes. Social media's influence on gender perceptions underscores the urgent need for diversity and inclusive management. By adopting these practices, platforms can mitigate the reinforcement of stereotypes and promote a more equitable digital environment.

Recommendations:

To addressing the multifaceted challenges of the impacts of social media on gender stereotypes and ensure increase inclusive management, the following recommendations could be of essential values:

- i. Strategies should be devised for recruitment, retention and advancement of diverse talents, particularly women and underrepresented minorities, at all levels. In essence it should be made a matter of policy when it comes to recruitment to ensure diversity and inclusivity at all levels of management.
- ii. There should be aggressive enforcement of regulations on social media especially those that would limit gender bias contents, and address online gender-based violence.
- iii. There should be continuous investigation and engagement of social media propagating gender-based sentiment and violence platforms promoting harmful content and discriminatory practices. This would ensure content censorship and hence restrict unauthorised contents.
- iv. Engagement with content creators that challenge stereotypes and assisting them to promote gender equality. This could involve making conscious choices about which platforms and brands to support based on their practices. Similarly, there should be participation in online activism and counter-speech efforts aimed at challenging stereotypes, while prioritizing personal safety.
- v. Support comprehensive media and digital literacy education programmes that equip users, especially young people, to critically evaluate online content, understand algorithmic influence, recognize gender stereotypes, and navigate online risks safely.

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